

**FAMILY BASED SERVICES ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY  
RAMP, RENAUD & HLAVENKA**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**ATTORNEY ANN RENAUD SAYS CHANGES IN LEGAL SYSTEM  
ARE NEEDED TO ADDRESS PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH  
ISSUES**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Long Branch, NJ, July 29, 2010) – East Brunswick attorney Ann Renaud called today for changes in New Jersey’s legal system while speaking at a program in Long Branch sponsored by the Family Based Services Association of New Jersey.

Ms. Renaud said the judicial system needs to be remade in a way that deals with mental health issues and drug dependency with compassion and understanding.

“Instead of viewing people as problems that need to be managed, we should all become their advocates and take on the challenge of unleashing the possibilities that exist within them,” she said.

Ms. Renaud said that lawmakers and court officials have given us, at best, a system that is simply inadequate. It hurts the people who need special help as well the communities that will eventually have to deal with them after they’ve failed to receive that help.

“We need to make changes in our court system to take a more compassionate approach in dealing with people who have mental health issues or need drug rehabilitation,” Ms. Renaud said. “I’ve worked in the judicial system as an advocate and as a former municipal court judge. I’ve seen the suffering that can be caused by a system that is not equipped to deal with people with these kinds of issues. It causes them unnecessary suffering and hurts us as a society.”

Ms. Renaud has called on Gov. Chris Christie to create mental health courts and to dedicate greater resources for research into mental illnesses and to bring insurance reimbursement for mental health services on par with other health services.

“If our court system continues to view people with mental illnesses and special needs only in terms of labels, it is going to continue this needless suffering,” Ms. Renaud said. “The system as it stands now is not designed to recognize their problems or provide compassionate, common-sense solutions.”

In her blog on [www.ramprenaud.com](http://www.ramprenaud.com), Renaud wrote, “Despite decades of good intentions on the part of our policymakers and the court system, the justice system in New Jersey today is inadequate. And the price of that failure is being paid not just by those who need help and aren’t getting it, but by all of us. Failing to deal effectively with mental health issues only results in further suffering by the individual and harm to society.”

Ms. Renaud said fundamental changes are needed in the way our system metes justice for those with mental health issues, citing the words of Baltimore Judge Charlotte Cooksey: “Our jails have become de facto psychiatric hospitals. That must change.”

At Thursday evening’s event, Renaud spoke about the rights of those with mental health and substance abuse issues. She will explore ways individuals caught in the justice system can advocate for themselves and utilize available public and private resources.

Renaud, who blogs regularly about the challenges faced by those with mental illness, developmental and intellectual disabilities and substance abuse issues on her website, also took questions from the audience.

#### **About Family Based Services Association of New Jersey**

Family Based Services Association of NJ Inc. is an organization of families and community members whose mission is to ensure that every family who has children with special emotional and behavioral needs is given community based resources and support. Each staff member has the extensive personal experience to better relate to family members with children who have emotional and/or behavioral challenges. Staff ensures each family receives individualized support, education, and advocacy. All services are free to the community.

#### **About Ramp, Renaud & Hlavenka**

The East Brunswick, NJ, law firm of Ramp, Renaud & Hlavenka, LLC provides its clients with in-depth expertise across all its practice areas—the sort of knowledge that enables its lawyers to chart successful strategies and deliver winning outcomes. Making that proficiency even more powerful is the meticulous preparation that goes into every case. The firm's attorneys treat every client with kindness and compassion. They understand that when individuals reach out to a lawyer, they are seeking help with their most personal and pressing problems.

Please visit [www.ramprenaud.com](http://www.ramprenaud.com) and [www.fbsanj.org](http://www.fbsanj.org)

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